



UNIVERSITY OF  
FLORIDA

# IFAS EXTENSION

## Friday's Feature

By

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### Sasanquas usher in camellia season

As autumn arrives, camellia season is beginning with the beautiful floral display of *Camellia sasanqua*. Most gardeners are more familiar with the sasanqua's cousin, *Camellia japonica*. While it's true that the "japonicas" have larger flowers and a more formal growth habit, *Camellia sasanqua* has just as many endearing attributes.

"Sasanquas", as they are called in the nursery trade, are evergreen shrubs. They have a more open growth habit, a finer texture and tend to be smaller than the japonicas. The leaves are lustrous dark green and just the right size to blend harmoniously with other shrubs.

Like the japonicas, sasanquas have been selected and hybridized into dozens of forms that vary immensely in flower color, size and shape. Sasanquas bear profusions of flowers in fall and early winter depending on cultivar and location. In general they bloom before the japonicas. The sasanqua flowering season can begin as early as October in Northwest Florida. The flowers are usually smaller and more open than the japonicas but no less diverse in color, or degree of doubleness. The petals fall individually rather than as a floral tube like the japonicas. And there is nothing prettier than a solitary sasanqua in full bloom surrounded by a spotlight circle of fallen blossoms.

Sasanquas are cold tolerant and tend to be more sun-tolerant than the japonicas. Most camellias, however, grow and produce better flowers in partial shade.

When planting any camellia, choose a site with well drained soil. They will not grow in wet locations such as areas with a high water table or hardpan.

Sasanquas prefer slightly acid soils with a pH between 5.0 and 5.5. Fortunately, most of our local soils are acid by nature and little or no pH adjustment is required. Avoid planting sites where the soil pH has been altered such as around the base of masonry walls or where seashells were used for driveways or walks. If your soil pH is too high (too alkaline), plants will become chlorotic or yellow. This occurs because many of the micronutrients like iron, manganese and zinc are tied up in alkaline soils and are less available to the plant.

Sasanquas are best planted from November through February to allow the roots to become established before summer heat. When transplanting, set the plant slightly higher than ground level. Excessively deep planting is a common cause of death in newly planted shrubs and trees.



The sasanquas have the advantage of blooming about the time of chrysanthemums and continuing through Thanksgiving and into December, depending on the fall and winter.

Sansanquas, if planted in a proper location, require minimal care. They require very little pruning except for the removal of damaged branches and long shoots that detract from the attractive form of the shrub. If pruning is necessary, prune in late winter or very early spring. Shearing should be avoided because it will result in a dense layer of foliage that blocks light from the interior branches. Shearing also destroys the natural plant form.

Sasanquas are as versatile as they are beautiful. Use them in mixed borders and hedges where they can provide fall color. Single specimens planted where they have room to assume their natural shape make engaging focal points on lawns and near patios.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.